

CHAPTER 4

For the rest of that day, we carried on moving out all our possessions that we had stacked in the hire van, so that Chris could get back to the ferry the next afternoon. We did not manage to get it all out as there were also the Micra, Range Rover and trailer to empty, but the bulk was done so that in the morning of Chris' return journey, we just had a few big cupboards from the workshop to put in the garage. As the van was going back empty (except for one cat basket that we had promised to Lesley), Chris would not have to check it in as freight, so could get to Esbjerg only a half hour or so before departure in late afternoon. He had arranged that Karen would meet him with her car in Barnet on Sunday afternoon when he dropped off the van at Wheels. We were very grateful to him for all the help, as we could never have managed the move so smoothly without it.

Of course, while we had the doors open, we had to keep the cats in our bedroom, but later in the day, we could let them out to explore the house further. Once we had seen Chris off on the Saturday, then they could be given the freedom of the house, and at last we could see them start to settle down. Of course, they had to accept that they had to use litter trays, but we had no mishaps. As our house has several big windows in the main rooms that go right down to the floor, they could get a good view of the garden all around, and by the time that we cautiously let them out a month later, they were well acquainted with the surroundings, by sight at least. To start with, we put Sashkin's harness on him and walked him around in sight of all the wondering little faces that rushed from window to window to keep him in sight! As he showed no sign of running off, I then undid the lead and simply followed him around wherever he led. Over the next week or so, we did the same with every cat, and had no problems at all, which we attributed to the views that they had had from the windows in the preceding few weeks. Before the trial runs, I had installed a cat door in the greenhouse's garden-side door, with a locking cover, so by judicious use of that and the greenhouses's house-side door, they could come and go as they were gradually introduced to the garden.

Of course, we were still keeping them in at night, and the usual discipline that they were so used to of supper at 10pm, made sure that they were either in by then, or ready to come.

Now I had better tell you about each cat, where they came from, what they were like, and when and where they were born.

Starting with the oldest - that was Twinkle. One of our neighbors, Jack, was a butcher and his assistant's family had kittens to find homes for. Jack asked us if we wanted another cat, and after only a little thought, we said yes. So one day one kitten was brought to the shop and that evening, Jack brought it home with him. As it was his late night, he thought that he would not disturb us, so kept the kitten overnight where his own cat, Fred, thought that it was quite nice. In the morning, Jack and Judy were so taken with the new kitten, that they almost decided to keep it for Fred, but Jack thought that they would have to check first to see if we had changed our minds, so brought it to our house in his little cardboard box tied up with butchers twine! We

hadn't, and brought it into the house where Jack introduced us to a very little semi-longhaired black and white kitten. Later, we looked in our Birthday Book under his birth date of the 10th March 1979 and found a quote referring to 'silver stars' - thus, Twinkle which went nicely with 'Twinkle, twinkle little cat, how I wonder what you're at!' Twinkle grew up into a much bigger cat, and he never forgot Fred. When he was big enough to use the cat door and find his way through Jack's back garden, he would go in Fred's cat door for fun and frolics. That included getting into their bed early in the morning and biting their toes; chasing with Fred all around the house, upstairs and downstairs, caroming off the front door, and skidding in the bath! When we built our swimming pool with yet another cat door, it was a common sight to see Fred taking a short cut right through the pool and house, in at one, and out at the other. Fred was a red cat, and when he died many years later, Twink found a new red friend called Marmaduke. When we moved in 1994, Twink had long been the boss of our household, and was then 15 years and a few days old.

Next oldest was, as far as we knew, Ptolomey. Ptoly or Tol, for short, came to us one day walking across the driveway in Finchley. He was a semi-longhaired cat, with a tabby back and white front, in fact, very much like a Norwegian Forest Cat. When we first saw him he looked rather dirty, but of a good shape. He was not frightened of us, and appeared again the next day. As he still looked rather dirty, we wondered if he was a stray, so I left a little food out for him which had disappeared by morning. To check that he was really lost, Eric and I managed to get him to run into the warehouse (it wasn't our showroom at that time) and cornered him without too much fuss. Then we put a collar on him that was ready prepared with a medallion with our address and telephone number - the theory being that any owner would wonder where that had suddenly appeared from and, hopefully, give us a ring.

He hung around for a few days, also visiting other families in the street, and then vanished for about ten days. This was in the autumn.

Then he appeared again looking none the worse for wear, but not much cleaner, and still with the collar on. That decided us - if no one had rung, and the collar was still there, then he could not have an owner, so it was up to us to adopt him. He certainly didn't object to more regular food, and none of the others complained, so we caught him once more without any trouble and off to the vet for a checkup. The best estimate that we could come up with for his age was that he was at least one year old at that time, so in 1982 we gave him a birthday of the 12th April 1981. He was still fertile, so he was neutered (all for the best even if an owner eventually turned up!) and back home to sleep it off and get properly introduced to the house and the other cats. All went well, and he soon found out when food time was, and how to use a cat door. Then, after only a few weeks, he disappeared again. Ten days or so went by with me regularly calling him in the garden and up the street, but no sign until one evening when I called, I fancied that I heard a faint reply. I tracked him down to the back of a neighbour's garden where he was apparently sheltering in their greenhouse. It really wasn't the poor cat's fault, as it had been snowing and obviously, as a wandering cat (who depend so much on scenting), he must have gone off on his old routes and couldn't find his way back.

(I almost forgot - *why* Ptolomey. Rather involved! 'I Claudius' had just been broadcast; we had a cat called Cleopatra; sounded good!)

The sequel came in the spring when a couple turned up one day in their car to ask how was our fluffy cat? They *had* read the medallion when he reappeared at their house, but as he didn't come back again, they hoped that he was back in his rightful home. If you are wondering why they didn't check before, well, they lived almost a mile away, and on the other side of the Northern Line! Ptoly had been back and forth between his friends at least five times, crossing the railway and two busy roads unscathed! That was a really tough little cat! It was great that he was around to see them, and he seemed to recognise them, although never went visiting again!

Almost at the same time as Ptolomey, we got ourselves another cat - or perhaps I should say, *I* got a cat! Cleo and our first Siamese both died that year, so the house seemed very empty, and I in particular, felt very lonely. We had a picture on the living room wall that I thought was of Lilac Point Siamese kittens (it wasn't!) and when browsing through the E&M cats for sale ads., I came across one for that breed. We promptly travelled down to South London to have a look, and came home with something that looked almost nothing like our picture - Myrtle thought it looked very odd! - but I loved him. He was born on the 4th of August 1982, so was eleven and a half years old when we moved. The first part of his story would more than fill another chapter, so it will appear later in Book 1. As for his name, well, as he was a pedigree kitten and registered with the GCCF, he already had a name, and that was Sashkin Bilbo - his breeder was a teacher, and hot on Tolkien! So Sash entered our lives, and after his eleven years in Finchley, came with us all to Skt Klemens.

Only a little younger than Sashkin was Shelley. Now, how did she get her name - guesses welcome, but I am afraid that you will never get it. I will backtrack a little to before her birth, when we actually took a photo of her heavily pregnant mother; not bad for an unknown stable cat! She was actually born on the 10th October 1982, so was only two months younger than Sash. It all came about as we had a job for Central TV to provide a marquee for a location shoot in Suffolk. The place was Kentwell Hall, and the series they were shooting was called 'No Excuses' with Charlotte Cornwell. We had to provide two different looking marquees and one was to be erected again in their main Borehamwood studio. We went to the Hall first in October 1982 where Shalley's mother strolled in and out of scenes and we got our own photo of her. Later, in December, her kittens were in the horses stables, and we first saw Shelley in actuality sprawled across a plate of sliced ham (too warm for the caterers to put back in the fridge at the end of the day) stuffed too full to move! The next day in the kitchen we asked the Hall's owner what would happen to the kittens, and were told that they would probably be drowned as they were not needed! Horror all round in the crew! We said that we would love the fat tortoiseshell one, and others said they would take one, so that disaster was averted. For both shoots we had taken our caravan with a couple of cats, so we took our kitten back with us that evening, smelling rather ripe, and cleaned her up ready to strike the next day and go back home. On the way back home our next youngest, Sash, was looked after by the kitten who laid her paw over him and he stopped crying about the journey.

The name? Charlotte's character in the series - Shelley Maze in full - simple in the end wasn't it! She went on to become a very famous cat, and the model for our TAM logo known all over the world. Several of our customers were Japanese, and they loved to take photos of the 'calico' cat who equally loved to pose for them all. Charlotte also had a picture of her in her daughters room in their house in London.

As this chapter is getting rather long, I will start another one for the other four cats.

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